

RECONCILIATION

Mr Brooke said that the views he would put forward were his own personal views and that they would obviously not find acceptance in all quarters.

In the early days community activity had started off as a concept that reconciliation could be achieved in the common cause against bad social conditions. Subsequently as sectarian conflict increased community activists no longer looked for opportunities for common action. The peace movement appeared to be going back to the original concept, but they had not yet established themselves in the community action field. Integrated education was a talking point, but it was not likely to have any general effect on reconciliation with a reasonable time scale. In his judgement the differences in the community which we were seeking to reconcile were ideological and political. By and large the Catholic community favoured a United Ireland, but there were two factors standing in the way of the realisation of this goal; the economics of the situation (higher state benefits etc in N Ireland) and the fact that the Protestant community was vehemently opposed to a United Ireland. While the professional and middle class Protestants probably accepted the inevitability of a 32 County Republic in time, the common run of Protestants would not entertain the possibility, given their strict adherence to the concept of Protestant liberty and free access to the Bible, freedoms which they would view the Catholic ideology as denying. Mr Brooke said that in his opinion reconciliation meant to be friendly disposed towards one another, with agreement to differ. The answer as he saw it came down to a question of housing with an effort being made to get people to live together in the same environment and gradually to wean them away from their ideological and religious differences. Television, games, entertainment, shopping etc were areas where the two communities came together. On the other hand there was no coming together in so far as the schools were concerned. These involved the Churches who were poles apart in their attitude to the teaching of the Bible in schools, and there was thus not likely to be any move on the integrated education front. Indeed, nothing could happen so long as the two sides lived apart. It had not even been possible to come together on a common history of Ireland. (Even if this had been possible it was likely that the two sides would put their own interpretation on certain events). It seemed to him important therefore to promote the maximum amount of out-of-school activities (games etc) as would bring the young people together on common ground. To sum up, it had to be accepted that there were two communities living together in one State and acceptance of this fact was the obvious starting point in looking for a solution.

In the course of consideration of Mr Brooke's views the following additional views were expressed -

- (a) If Mr Brooke's general thesis were accepted, integrated housing was essential.. Catholics were presently caught in a web of fear and as a consequence were drawn to the estates of their own persuasion. There would need therefore to be a controlled approach to integrated housing, with houses being allocated alternately to Protestant and Catholic families. The Department of Environment were already looking at the possibilities under the heading of "sectarian engineering". The difficulty was that this approach would cut across the whole system of housing need, where houses were allocated on a points basis related to need. It was a concept which would have to be tackled peripherally at the outset. There was also a case for encouraging more home ownership since in the private sector the two sides by and large showed less resistance to live side by side.
- (b) Vatican II had had little effect in N Ireland and there was a clear need for the appointment of more liberally minded Bishops.
- (c) Any efforts by Government at reconciliation were unlikely to have effect in that the two communities were polarised, the majority of Catholics owing allegiance to a United Ireland and the majority of Protestants to the UK. It was absolutely essential to stamp out the violence. If this were done the Catholic community would accept the situation and the UVF (given the demise of the IRA) would disappear.
- (d) The PUS thought that Mr Brooke's use of the term "agreement to differ" was more helpful and realistic than "reconciliation". The ideal of a homogeneous whole was a long way off, but given a sufficient understanding of each others ideals and cultures, agreement to differ, in an otherwise stable community, seemed a more viable concept from which to start.
- (e) A full understanding of Ireland's historical background (perhaps through use in schools etc of the facsimilie material being produced by the Public Record Office), was a gap which required to be filled. There was also a case for increased inter-school activity in the absence of integration.
- (f) Jealousy and suspicion were rife. If the social and economic problems affecting the community could be cured this would take the heat out of the situation and have the effect of changing attitudes on both sides, one towards the other. It was also essential to re-establish confidence in the stability of Government and the constitutional framework if suspicions arising out of political instability were to be

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allayed. This could not be achieved by speeches or statements, but rather by the actions of Government as it moved forward.

- (g) Under the former Stormont Parliament a Minister had been charged with responsibility for community relations and as such represented the voice of public conscience in the Cabinet. The question was whether there was anyone now at political level who filled this role. It was argued on the other hand that the appointment of a Minister with responsibility for community relations meant that others tended to leave responsibility for making advances in this direction to him. This had been a weakness.
- (h) There was scarcely likely to be any advance on the lines of power-sharing by politicians and there was thus a strong argument for "bread and butter" issues having the co-operation of both communities. In the Health & Personal Social Services there was a high degree of sharing (with members and staff 'mixed') and the arrangements were working very satisfactorily, in the absence of ideological and political issues. It was important therefore to come together to attack the social problems for the sake of the problems.
- (i) In view of the uncertainties surrounding the political situation there might be merit in decreeing a state of Direct Rule for 10 years hence, as a positive act and as a means of defusing the situation. The FUS saw disadvantages in a moratorium of this kind eg it would do nothing to fill the "Macrory gap". It was also noted that the Referendum had had no effect on the situation.
- (j) Again on the political uncertainty angle, it was advisable to keep the "Irish dimension" out of the situation (this represented a stumbling block to the coming together of the two sides) and it was also desirable that Westminster should desist from treating N Ireland differently from the rest of the UK. On the "Irish dimension" point it was argued that Eire politicians would continue to comment on the N Ireland situation whether we liked it or not; moreover, if the terrorists were to be dealt with this would require North/South security co-operation.
- (k) It was absolutely essential to keep in mind the serious economic plight of N Ireland. If it were impossible to achieve a reduction in the level of violence, then there could be no progress on the economic or social fronts.
- (l) As was the case in the industrial relations field, so in the political arena, neither side was prepared to make the first move towards a solution. Government had no lead role at this stage and the parties

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therefore simply reacted to Government. There might be something to be gained from having a focal point outside Government eg a person of standing and integrity, without political affiliations, in the role of "Chief Conciliation Officer" who would be available to talk to the parties, to discover what their aims were, on what points there was common ground, etc and at the appropriate stage to bring in Government. It seemed essential to work from the top down, rather than from the bottom up, although this was not to say that there should not at the same time be peripheral moves from the grass roots level.

- (m) It was also important to let it be known what was being done in the appointment of members of boards etc. with full consideration being accorded to members of the minority, young people and women, thus demonstrating that there were those in the community who were prepared to work together. This could have the effect of encouraging others to follow suit.

The PUS thanked members for their contribution to the discussion. It was evident that power-sharing did exist in N Ireland, albeit not described as such. This was not generally known and he thought it was something which might profitably be given wider publicity, particularly in GB.

- 4. If the two sides were to understand each other they had to come together and live together and it was then seen that the answer in the main came down to a question of housing, with efforts being made to encourage the two sides to live together in the same environment and gradually to wean them away from their respective ideological, political and religious differences. To achieve this end there had to be a controlled approach to integrated housing, with houses in the estates eventually being allocated alternately to Protestant and Catholic families. It was noted that the Department of the Environment was already looking at the possibilities of this approach under the heading of "sectarian engineering". One difficulty was that houses were currently allocated on a points basis, related to need. The new concept would, therefore, set against established housing policy. There was also seen to be a case for encouraging more home ownership since in the private housing sector, the two sides tended to show much less reluctance to live side by side.
- 5. It was agreed that while integrated education might be a talking point, it was not reckoned to be achievable within a reasonable time scale and thus of little relevance in bridging the current divisions in the community.